

Small Business Development Center gets rave reviews for free advice, helps clients land \$5.88 million in loans

By JONDI GUMZ -- Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ - Mina Feuerhaken, 27, opened her own business, Nut Kreations, with husband Brody, last year, and since then, they've created four jobs.

Jo Minola, 58, opened Moda Bellissima, a fashion boutique for women, in September, leveraging her experience as a buyer.

Ben Vickery, 29, and his wife Nikya Stone Smith, 28, opened Ben's Motorcycles Works in Freedom, a repair shop specializing in BMWs, in July. They have so many customers they are going to expand their space and hire two employees.

Wendy Mayer-Lochtefeld, 51, made the leap from employee to owner at Capitola Book Cafe with booksellers Melinda Powers, Janet Leimeister and Richard Lange as the economy went into a tailspin. They've kept the doors open for their loyal fans.

What all four have in common: They all turned to the Central Coast Small Business Development Center for advice. The center, overseen by Teresa Thomae on the Cabrillo College campus in Aptos, is a key resource for local business owners, whether they are long established or start-ups.

Last year, the center provided 409 business owners with free one-on-one counseling, assisted with the opening of 41 businesses, helped create 234 jobs, and helped clients obtain

more than \$5.8 million in loans.

"We are No. 1 of the Northern California SBDCs (small business development centers) in loan generation," said Thomae. "This is an amazing statistic."

The most active lender in the Small Business Administration's Northern California region, which extends to the Oregon border, is in Santa Cruz, the nonprofit Santa Cruz Community Credit Union. Business owners who have worked with Thomae and her team of business advisors are effusive in their praise.

"They're there not just for people starting out," said Mayer-Lochtefeld. "They're available for people battling dragons in the economy. It's nice to be able to go back to them."

The Capitola Book Cafe, established in 1980, faces a big challenge from Amazon.com's bargain basement prices. The bookshop counters with author talks, teacher recognition nights, Writers' Workshop and partnerships with the Parent Center and Poetry Santa Cruz.

Minola, who opened her boutique in September, is trying to plan inventory with consultant Larry Hebert, someone she finds very knowledgeable. "He is probably a \$250- to \$350-an-hour guy,"



she said. "I could never afford him."

She hopes to partner with neighboring stores, like Wallflower, Buttercup Cakes and Sockshop & Shoe Company to boost sales.

"It's hard to predict anything when you've been in business five months," she said.

Feuerhaken credits advisor Keith Holtaway, founder of Pizza My Heart, with helping her find a location downtown and what to look for in the lease. "He knows so many people," she said. "It's great for networking."

She welcomed the opportunity to talk with experts in point-of-sales and human resources.

"It was nice to have somebody give me a road map for the HR stuff," she said. "The best part is that it's all free, which I cannot believe."

Smith met with Holtaway two days after she called seeking advice. She learned about the permits, licenses, insurance and line of credit, and most of all, appreciated Holtaway's emotional support.

Last year's local Small Business Development Center budget totaled about \$350,000, from federal, state and local funds. Next year will be a challenge, Thomaie said, noting that she won't get getting \$60,000 contributed by local redevelopment agencies since that program was shuttered.

"We hope state will come through with funding for the program," she said.

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By THE NUMBERS

Small Business Development Center 2011

Clients receiving free one-on-one counseling:

409

Counseling hours: 3,234

Seminars presented: 60

Attendance at seminars: 1,108

Increase in sales attributed to SBDC help: \$1.66 million

Number of businesses SBDC helped start: 41

Jobs created: 234

Loans received by clients: \$5.88 million

Source: <http://centralcoastsbdc.org/>

